



President Shelly pays respect to fallen warriors, presents wreath in their honor



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said he will issue an executive order for tribal branches, divisions, departments and programs to join in the Memorial Day celebration honoring fallen warriors at Window Rock Veterans Memorial Park. He presented the wreath of honor at the park before sunrise on Monday. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Before sunrise on Memorial Day, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly and a crowd of people gathered at Window Rock Veterans Memorial Park to pay respect to the Navajo veterans that were killed in action or missing in action.

The Memorial Day event began with reveille and flag-raising ceremony. The flags were raised to full-staff before being slowly lowered to half-staff in honor of those killed in battle.

Deputy assistant director of the Arizona Dept. of Veterans Services, Mike Klier, joined President Shelly to lay the wreath of honor for Navajo servicemen and women that died in combat.

The wreath was laid on the east side of the park, where the names of fallen Navajo warriors are listed.

President Shelly said he would issue an executive order for the participation of Navajo Nation branches of government to pay respect to fallen warriors on Memorial Day.

“We’ll make it a tradition to have (a ceremony) here, with members of all our Navajo warriors,” he said. “The sun came up and my wife and I are here to join you in remembrance of our American heroes.”

Joining the president were representatives from the Dept. of Navajo Veterans Affairs, families that lost loved ones in battle, and a representative from the ADVS.

President Shelly said Navajo warriors didn’t hesitate to enlist for duty because of their love of country and their willingness to give their lives for it.

“I’ll issue an executive order for the Navajo Nation to have every program in our government be here to honor and remember our fallen heroes for the years to come,” President Shelly said.

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Klier has served as the tribal liaison for the agency for more than 12 years.

He said the celebration of Memorial Day goes back to the days of the Civil War, when wives and mothers would visit the graves of Confederate soldiers to decorate their graves.

“I used to be called ‘Decoration Day,’ ” he said.

Klier served in Vietnam and saw combat. He said many veterans from that era were not welcomed when

they returned home and that the country was filled with strife from racism, assassinations, impeachments and the unpopular war in Southeast Asia.

“But life moves forward. You take those things that you learned back in the day and apply them to today,” Klier said. “We want to honor those that lost their lives.”

David Nez is the director of the DNVA and a U.S. Army veteran that served in the 82nd Airborne Division during the Persian Gulf War.

“Today, the Navajo Nation joins with our commander-in-chief to pay tribute to our men and women in uniform who have died in service to the United States,” Nez said.

He said Memorial Day was more than a three-day weekend, that it was a time of quiet reflection at national cemeteries and public places.

Nez said, “Today we pay tribute to the freedom fighters of every generation who gave the last full measure of devotion: World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Including those that gave their lives during the terrible years of the Navajo Long Walk. It is because of them that we are survivors living here today.”

Before the conclusion of the ceremony, Gold Star Mothers brought out their American flags to be unfolded and refolded. This ceremony not only airs out the flags and gives them a chance to breathe, but it also commemorates the fallen warriors again.

President Shelly shared the significance of the 13 folds

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of the American flag with the surviving family members and said they could stop in at the president’s office for a copy of “My Name is Old Glory,” a poem written by Howard Schnauber.

“We thank you all for joining us early today,” he said.

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Navajo veterans posted the colors at the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park before sunrise on Memorial Day. The flags were raised to the top before slowly being raised at half-staff in honor of Navajo veterans killed in combat. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The color guard saluted the flags posted at half-staff before the start of the Memorial Day celebration. David Nez, a combat veteran of the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, led the festivities. Nez served in the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Navajo families brought their American flags to the event, so they could be unfurled and refolded by the veterans in attendance. The families of fallen warriors were presented American flags during the funeral services. In some instances, these flags are unfolded to receive fresh air annually on Memorial Day. (Photo by Rick Abasta)